



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION III
1650 Arch Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103-2029

March 15, 2010

Ms. Susan Spain, Project Executive
The National Mall Plan
National Mall & Memorial Parks
900 Ohio Drive, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20024

Re: National Mall Plan, To Prepare a Long-Term Plan that will Restore National Mall,
Implementation, Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Washington, D.C. (CEQ #20090432)

Dear Ms. Spain:

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, Section 309 of the Clean Air Act and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1509), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the National Mall Plan in Washington, D.C.

The National Mall covers approximately 684 acres and each year the National Park Service (NPS) receives over 6,000 applications for public gathering permits, resulting in around 3,000 events. In one year (2008), for instance, the National Mall received approximately 22.3 million visits. The purpose and need for the proposed action is to develop a long-term plan that will restore the National Mall so that it may continue to symbolize the ideals and greatness envisioned for the United States of America. The approved plan will be followed by site-specific implementation plans including additional compliance with the NEPA and National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), as needed.

The DEIS examines five alternatives for the management of the National Mall in Washington, D.C. They are: the No-Action Alternative which would continue current conditions; Alternative A would focus on the historic landscape with its memorials and planned vistas; Alternative B would focus on creating a welcoming national civic space for public gatherings, events, and high-use levels; Alternative C would focus on urban recreation and use plus a sustainable urban ecology; and the Preferred Alternative which combines ideas from all of the other alternatives considered. It would establish a sense of place and an overall identity for the National Mall, creating a coherent pedestrian environment that would complement and balance the natural environment, formal and informal features, and national commemorative works.



In general, the Preferred Alternative would involve refurbishing the premier civic space so that very high levels of use could be perpetuated and the needs of visitors met in an energy-efficient and sustainable manner. Its memorials and landscapes would be protected, with large areas of open space as defining features of the historic landscape. Lawns and elm trees would be improved and protected. Compacted soils would be removed and replaced with engineered soils capable of better withstanding intensive use. Visitor amenities would be added throughout the Mall including the addition of a multipurpose facility to include food service, restrooms, education exhibits, information, a book store, retail, recreation equipment rentals (model boats, portable lawn chairs). Pedestrian circulation would be improved including constructing separate bicycle and pedestrian trails and redesigning the tour bus drop-off area, widening walkways, and paving gravel walkways. The Preferred Alternative would incorporate additional recreational opportunities and improved playing fields, more shaded seating, additional pedestrian lighting, and an emergency notification system. In addition, the Tidal Basin seawalls would be rebuilt; a vegetated shoreline would be established along the Potomac River. The lake at Constitution Gardens would be rebuilt to be self-sustainable, with potentially a nonpotable, sustainable water source. A small reflecting pool is considered at Union Square which may be constructed for various uses.

EPA supports the purpose and need for the proposed action and the Preferred Alternative. However, as a result of our review of the DEIS, EPA developed comments and questions (presented in the attached Technical Comments). Specific concerns are expressed regarding water resources, fish and wildlife, and soils; in particular impacts to habitat in the Tidal Basin. EPA rated the DEIS an EC-2 (Environmental Concerns/Insufficient Information), which indicates that we have environmental concerns regarding the proposal and that there is insufficient information in the document to fully assess the environmental impacts of this project. A copy of the EPA's rating system is enclosed for your information.

Thank you for providing EPA with the opportunity to review this project. If you have questions regarding these comments, the staff contact for this project is Karen DelGrosso; she can be reached at 215-814-2765.

Sincerely,



Barbara Rudnick
NEPA Team Leader
Office of Environmental Programs

Enclosures (4)



Technical Comments

Water Resources

It is stated on page 392, "...under the preferred alternative nonpotable water sources would be used in ornamental features where feasible..." EPA commends the NPS for its plan to seek sustainable water use and reuse of graywater. It is suggested that if a specific water quality standard for graywater is required for the ornamental features that it be stated and the process for adhering and managing the standard is specified in the FEIS. (Is signage required to identify graywater for awareness purposes especially since children are inclined to expose themselves to the water in ornamental features? If not required, it may be a tool to emphasize the NPS's approach to seeking sustainable water which would also serve to inform the public of the type of water used within the ornamental features.)

The NPS plans to rebuild the Tidal Basin seawalls and widen the walkways. Widening the walkways could require moving the basin wall into the basin, resulting in the loss of about 5 acres of warm and shallow water habitat used by fish and other aquatic organisms. The Tidal Basin is 107-acres and is 6-foot-deep. The water is slightly brackish due to tidal inflows from the Chesapeake Bay and supports a variety of native and nonnative fish. The FEIS should specify the rationale for selecting fill as the NPS option and discuss other alternatives that may have been analyzed.

The water quality of the Tidal Basin was not discussed; however, as noted in the comment below under Fish and Wildlife it would be reasonable to assume that the water quality of the Tidal Basin is influenced by the Potomac River which may have PCBs and other chemical contaminants. The FEIS should specify the water quality of the Tidal Basin. In addition, construction of the seawall could result in increased levels of sediment being released into the water. The use of appropriate erosion and sediment control measures would prevent the sediment from reaching the Tidal Basin. To ensure that appropriate measures are used for the installation of the seawall, a description and discussion of the specific erosion and sediment control measure(s) should be identified.

In addition, EPA encourages coordination with the Baltimore District U.S. Corps of Engineers to discuss the necessity of permitting requirements for work in the Tidal Basin.

The Cumulative Impacts section on page 393 does not reference the NPS's proposal to consider rehabilitating the water system for the Lincoln Reflecting Pool. Also, the DEIS does not mention the Environmental Assessment to Repair and Control Settlement at Thomas Jefferson Memorial Seawall. The impacts on water resources in combination with those water-related projects proposed for the National Mall should be discussed. It is suggested that the FEIS reflect these projects and state why they are addressed separately and not included in the National Mall Plan.



Fish and Wildlife

Page 301 states that recreational fishing is allowed in the Tidal Basin. "However, urban pollution has adversely affected regional fish diversity and population numbers. PCBs and other chemical contaminants continue to be found in some fish caught in the Potomac and Anacostia rivers and their tributaries, including Rock Creek." With the proposal to move the Tidal Basin walls into the Basin, the FEIS should specify the habitat that would be affected by this disturbance and how the work can impact the habitat in the basin? In addition, since fish may already be compromised by contaminants, what measures will the NPS incorporate to protect habitat during construction?

The Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act provides that whenever the waters or channel of a body of water are modified by a department or agency of the U.S., the department or agency first shall consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and with the head of the agency exercising administration over the wildlife resources of the state where construction will occur, with a view to the conservation of wildlife resources. Thus, it is imperative that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service be consulted when necessary.

Soils/Vegetation

The NPS is proposing to improve soil conditions in heavily used areas in the center of the Mall by replacing or augmenting soils or implementing other sustainable technologies. In doing so, the hope would be to decrease soil compaction, increase soil quality and productivity by increasing the soils capacity to hold water and air. There is no mention of the kinds of sustainable technologies that may be used to improve soils. However, the NPS is planning to prepare an EA to address the alternatives for improving the growing conditions for turf and trees and an evaluation of options will be addressed. EPA is interested in receiving the proposed EA to assess the NPS alternatives. In the meantime, EPA poses the following questions:

With replacing or augmenting soils or implementing sustainable technologies, can it be projected how long the improved soil conditions are expected to last and a plan developed to incorporate a timetable for scheduled monitoring or maintenance? Has the NPS considered implementing soil stabilization (seeding or covering areas that have been disturbed, tilled, etc) during construction? It is suggested that the NPS consider infiltration trenching (adding a sub-layer of permeable material such as gravel, to increase infiltration) as well as consider directing run off from paved areas to the permeable ones.

In an effort to protect the hundreds of American elm trees and many acres of turf affecting the historic tapis verte (grass panels) which is the essential feature of the 1930 version of McMillan Plan, it would seem prudent to implement a monitoring plan to ensure permeability of soils and overall health of turf and trees. EPA commends the NPS for its discussion and commitment (page 66, Monitoring and Adaptive Management) to propose undertaking implementation plans to lay out how to achieve desired resource conditions as well as monitor progress. EPA suggests that an in depth discussion of the monitoring plans for the proposed alternatives to improve soils, turf and trees be outlined and compared in the proposed EA.



Pollution Prevention

Page 453, discusses the need for a comfortable, walkable environment utilizing a coordinated hierarchy of paving materials to unify the National Mall. Although the paving materials would be commensurate with the importance of the National Mall and include surfaces appropriate for runners and joggers, EPA suggests looking into the possibility of using eco-friendly materials made of recycled materials.

To prevent runoff from newly developed areas from eroding steep areas, good environmental design should be employed to minimize and control runoff. Detention basins or paving with permeable asphalt or crushed stone may be appropriate where applicable.

Since new restrooms are planned, it is suggested to conserve water consumption by installing low-flow toilets. To ensure adequate supply and quality of water, monitoring of the water table and chemical testing of the water should be conducted.

Energy Efficiency

This project does present an excellent opportunity to implement the President's Executive Order 13423, Strengthening Federal Environmental Energy and Transportation Management by incorporating energy efficiency into the planning efforts. Enclosed with this letter is information that we recommend the NPS to consider when planning the various phases of the project.

Waste Management and Recycling

While incineration or burning the waste to generate electricity is a higher use in EPA waste hierarchy than landfilling, see <http://www.epa.gov/epawasate/nonhaz/municipal/index.htm>, it is recommended that the NPS recycle as much of their solid waste as possible.

While it may not be practical or cost effective to place recycling containers near all of the Mall's 650-700 trash receptacles, the NPS should try to have recycling containers placed next to as many waste receptacles as possible and post signage encouraging people how and where to recycle on the Mall.

On page 352, Waste Management and Recycling section, the text reads "A recycling program conducted by a corporate donor in the early 1900s...." The text should probably be corrected to read "1990s" instead of 1900s.

If the NPS has not already done so, EPA suggests that they discuss their recycling and composting program with the following contacts in the DC area. They are as follows:

The Department of Public Works:

William B. Easley, Jr. Recycling Program Officer
Office of Recycling
3220 Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E.



Washington, D.C. 200020
202-646-8513 (direct)
202-645-8245 (hotline)
Email: william.easley@dc.gov

Russell Klein, Environmental Education Program Coordinator
Office of Recycling
3220 Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20020
202-645-8245 (hotline)
202-645-7191 (main)
202-645-8518 (fax)
Email: Russell.klein@dc.gov

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments:

John M. Snarr, Principal Environmental Planner
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
Department of Environmental Programs
777 North Capitol Street, N.E., Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002
202-962-3359
202-962-3203 (fax)

Email: jsnarr@mwkog.org
<http://www.mwcog.org/environmental/recycling/>

Brenda Platt, Institute for Local Self-Reliance
927 15th Street, N.W., 4th floor
Washington, DC 20005
202-898-1610 ext. 230
Email: bplatt@ilsr.org
www.ilsr.org

The most important step in setting up a waste collection and recycling program is negotiating a good contract with the waste/recycling hauler. EPA has enclosed tips that are essential to negotiating a good contract with the hauler.

